

Barwen Tavaziva

Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Report
2022/2023

I received the Lisa Ullmann Travel Scholarship Fund grant in 2022 - 2023 to enable me to travel to Zimbabwe so that I could reconnect with my homeland, which I hadn't visited for 15 years. Being awarded this scholarship was a profound moment for me because it alleviated a lot of negativity I had felt about being exiled from my own country, Zimbabwe, during Robert Mugabe's regime.

Since it is a unique blend of ballet, contemporary and African dance that characterises my company Tavaziva's dance aesthetic, not being able to visit Zimbabwe, the wellspring of that uniqueness for 15 years, weighed heavy on my mind and distracted me from doing my work properly. I felt the lack of physical contact with the land keenly.



The trip was of great importance to me personally and artistically. For example, during my exile from Zimbabwe, I was unable to attend my parents' funerals. I didn't anticipate how much of a release I would feel being able to visit their graves to see where they had been laid to rest.

Since I returned to London, I have felt spiritually restored and creatively reignited. My trip to Zimbabwe has reminded me of the purposefulness with which I set up Tavaziva Dance almost 20 years ago. I have renewed vigour in my purpose to be an activist via the medium of dance and to spread Shona culture, my culture, through the world.

While I was in Zimbabwe, I ran a dance workshop with 30 young people, and I am collaborating with the organisation AfriKera to form a long term partnership that will enable me to spend longer periods teaching in Zimbabwe on behalf of Tavaziva.

I am a proficient percussionist, but I started learning to play the mbire while I was in Zimbabwe. I also learned a lot about singing and Zimbabwean dancehall, and I intend to incorporate more of my own singing and original music compositions into future dance pieces.

Since returning, I have run two week-long dance intensive programmes for recent graduates and early career professionals based on Tavaziva's dance aesthetic. I am also beginning an exciting collaboration with BBO Dance and Compass Youth Dance Company that will enable 14 -17 year olds to gain free professional training and creative experience.

I am so grateful to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for helping to facilitate this reconnection with my homeland and the wellspring of my creativity. As I look forward to the 20th anniversary of Tavaziva Dance in 2024, I hope that my work can reflect this act of faith by inspiring dancers and audiences around the world.

